

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 20

THE NEW YORK TIMES
13 November 1977

Turner Begins Personnel Cuts in the C.I.A.'s Clandestine Services

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Nov. 12—Adm. Stansfield Turner, the Director of Central Intelligence, has begun a personnel reduction in the clandestine services of the Central Intelligence Agency that he promised to make last Aug. 9, agency officials said today.

On Oct. 31, Adm. Turner issued a circular to agency employees announcing that 198 agents involved in clandestine operations would be dismissed effective next March, and he also signaled further cuts next year.

The cuts are part of a program to eliminate about 800 positions in the directorate of operations, which handles clandestine collection of foreign intelligence information and covert operations overseas. Administration officials said that about 300 clandestine agents had already been dismissed this year at the request of the Office of Management and Budget.

The cuts were long expected and are in large part a result of the Indochina conflict, which ended in 1975. Planning for the reductions began under the directorship of William E. Colby and was continued under his successor, George Bush, who preceded Adm. Turner.

Administration officials remarked that after the withdrawal of the United States from the Indochina hostilities approximately 800 C.I.A. clandestine service operatives returned to this country from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. There was little for these Asia specialists to do at agency headquarters in McLean, Va., the officials remarked.

The reductions, they said, also reflect two other trends: a marked aversion on the part of the Ford and Carter Administrations to covert intelligence operations and an increasing reliance on technological means of collecting intelligence in place of spies.

Covert operations were once the pride of the C.I.A., and this was reflected in big budgets and large personnel rolls in the directorate of operations. At one time, in the 1960s, an agency veteran recalled, the agency was running 40 covert operations out of West Germany simultaneous-

ly, most of them against Soviet bloc countries.

Administration officials estimate that about 4,000 of the agency's roughly 16,000 employees are now officers in the directorate of operations. The bulk of the new cuts, one official said, would be made on the basis of efficiency ratings conducted annually at each grade level in the directorate.

The last major personnel reductions at the agency were ordered in March 1973 by James R. Schlesinger in his short tenure as director. About 1,800 employees from all parts of the agency were dismissed or compelled to retire early.

The latest cuts announced by Admiral Turner have contributed to a further decline in agency morale, veteran intelligence officials said today, even though they derived from plans laid down by his two predecessors.

One longtime C.I.A. official said he felt that morale was at its lowest point since the abortive Cuba Bay of Pigs invasion in April 1961. But this official and others attributed morale problems more to Admiral Turner's alleged proclivity for running the agency with his own hand-picked aides from the Navy, where he served since World War II, than to the personnel reductions.

These officials said this was illustrated last July by the resignation of Enno Henry Knoche as deputy director of intelligence, the No. 2 agency post, after he found his decisions being reversed by Admiral Turner.

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